

# En Guard!

April is National Youth Sports Safety Month. According to the American Dental Association, more than 2 million teeth are knocked out each year due to sports-related injuries; however, approximately 200,000 high-school and college athletes use mouthguards to avoid such injuries. To protect your mouth while you're on the field, talk to your dentist about having a custom athletic mouthguard made for you.

## What is a mouthguard?

An athletic mouthguard is a flexible appliance that is worn during athletic and recreational activities to protect teeth from trauma. Custom-fabricated mouthguards are essential for preventing athletic oral/facial injuries, such as broken teeth, jaw fractures, cerebral hemorrhages, and neck injuries. Mouthguards are effective at moving the lips and cheeks away from the teeth, thus preventing cutting and bruising of these soft tissues—especially for those who wear orthodontic appliances. Wearing a mouthguard also may reduce the severity and incidence of concussions.

## When should I wear a mouthguard?

It is advisable to wear a mouthguard anytime there is a strong chance for contact with other participants or with hard surfaces. The National Youth Sports Foundation for the Prevention of Athletic Injuries, Inc. reports that dental injuries are the most common type of orofacial injury sustained during sports-related activities. Mouthguards should be worn when participating in activities such as basketball, softball, football, wrestling, soccer, lacrosse, rugby, in-line skating, martial arts, skateboarding, and bicycling.

## What are the different types of mouthguards?

There are several types of mouthguards, including the following:

- **Stock mouthguard:** This least expensive option is a ready-made stock item, which offers the least protection since little can be done to adjust its fit. This type of mouthguard requires the user to close the jaw to hold it in place; as a result, it may interfere with speech and breathing. It also may lead to soreness of the muscles of the jaw. A stock mouthguard is not considered an acceptable device for facial protection.
- **Mouth-formed mouthguard:** There are two types of mouth-formed mouthguards. The first is a shell-liner mouthguard that is made from an acrylic material that is poured into an outer



shell, where it forms a lining. When placed in an athlete's mouth, the lining material molds to the teeth and is allowed to set. The second type is a thermoplastic (also known as a "boil-and-bite") mouthguard. This type of mouthguard is softened in hot water, placed in the mouth, and shaped around the teeth by using a finger or tongue and sometimes biting pressure. This type of mouthguard can provide some degree of protection, but usually it will be bulky and have a loose fit.

- **Custom-made mouthguard:** The best choice is a mouthguard that is custom-made by your dentist. It offers the best protection, fit, and comfort level because it is made from a model of your teeth.

## How should I care for my mouthguard?

- Clean your mouthguard by washing it with soap and cool (not hot) water.
- Before storing your mouthguard, soak it in denture cleaner or a diluted mixture of bleach (one teaspoon bleach in 8 ounces of water; soak for 30 minutes, then rinse).
- Keep your mouthguard in a well-ventilated, plastic storage container when you are not using it. Make sure the container has several holes in it so that the mouthguard will dry after you wash it.
- Protect the mouthguard from high temperatures caused by hot water, hot surfaces, or direct sunlight to minimize distortion of its shape.
- Don't bend your mouthguard when storing.
- Don't handle or wear someone else's mouthguard.
- Check the mouthguard for general wear. If you find holes or tears in it—or if it becomes loose or causes discomfort—replace it.
- Bring the mouthguard to each regularly scheduled dental visit so that your dentist can examine it.

For more information about mouthguards, talk to your dentist.

## Resources

[www.knowyourteeth.com](http://www.knowyourteeth.com)

Brought to you by the AGD, this Web site answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and can help visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

## 1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.

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